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ABSTRACT

The handbook, designed for Peace Corps volunteers but adaptable for other adult learners, offers ideas about how to improve one's own language learning through effective learning strategies. The handbook intended as a reference, not a text, for when the learner becomes discouraged with his rate of progress, is progressing well but looking for new and more effective techniques, or simply wants to increase enjoyment. The first chapter answers some of the most common questions about learning foreign languages, presents some basic principles of language learning, and introduces the language learning strategies discussed in greater detail later. The second chapter outlines basic strategies used by successful language learners to manage their learning, such as experimenting with the language, recognizing and learning from errors, evaluating progress, and encouraging oneself. Chapter three describes ways to organize language learning, including setting goals, deciding about skills priorities, keeping a notebook, scheduling learning, and focusing attention. The fourth chapter offers suggestions for improving retention of vocabulary, grammar, and concepts in a new language. The subsequent chapter covers strategies for learning with an instructor and learning independently. The final chapter presents ways to continue learning the language on the job, including job- and task-specific language. (MSE)

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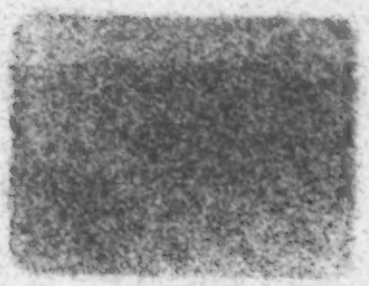
LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

FOR

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS



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LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

FOR

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

by

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Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to give you, as a Peace Corps Volunteer, some useful suggestions and ideas about how you can improve your language learning. You have a limited time to learn a new language which will be important to your effectiveness on the job as a Peace Corps Volunteer. You can best use your language learning time by using effective language learning strategies. A learning strategy is a technique you can use to improve your language skills. Read this handbook, consider which learning strategies might fit you the best, and then experiment with the strategies.

This handbook is not meant to be read cover to cover. Instead, it should be referred to over time. This handbook may be useful to you in any of the following situations:

- If you are discouraged with your rate of progress in language learning;
- If you are progressing fairly well but are searching for some new and more effective techniques to use;
- If you simply want to have more fun with language learning.

We suggest that you start with *Chapter One*, which answers some of the most common questions about learning foreign languages. In answering these questions, that chapter provides some basic principles of language learning and introduces the language learning strategies discussed later. Chapter One gives a helpful background for you and will allow you to better use the information in the later chapters. After you have read Chapter One, feel free to move to any other chapter that seems relevant to your current situation. Look over the chapter headings and subheadings found in the Table of Contents. Browse through the chapters themselves to find the ones that catch your interest. Here are some of the general topics covered:

- *Chapter Two* outlines basic strategies used by successful language learners to manage their learning, such as experimenting with the language, recognizing your errors and learning from them, evaluating your progress, and encouraging yourself.
- *Chapter Three* describes ways to organize your language learning, including setting goals, deciding about skills priorities, keeping a notebook, scheduling your learning, and focusing your attention.
- *Chapter Four* is the memory-building chapter, which gives helpful hints on how to retain vocabulary, grammar, and concepts in the new language.
- *Chapter Five* covers strategies for learning with an instructor and on your own.
- *Chapter Six* presents ways to continue learning the language when you are actually on the job.

Some strategies given here may appear to be "common sense" to you, and you may have already been using them; but what may seem like common sense to you may be totally new to someone else. By the same token, certain strategies may appear novel to you, but may be second nature to one of your classmates. Just because a certain strategy is familiar doesn't mean it is the best strategy, and just because you've never heard of a given strategy doesn't mean you shouldn't give it a try.

Furthermore, language learners are all different. Therefore, a strategy that is good for one person might not be good for the next (though there are certain "universals," such as finding opportunities to practice, which seem to be useful for everyone).

Remember that good learning strategies can enhance *everyone's* language learning. Even a person whose language aptitude appears to be less than that of someone else can overcome this problem through the use of strategies. The successful language learner can make even better progress by using appropriate strategies.

Keep an open mind about any and all strategies that are included in this handbook. Learning languages takes a sense of adventure and a certain amount of experimentation on your part. Determine which of these strategies – whether they are familiar or new to you – might be useful and interesting. Then continue to use the best of the familiar ones, and try out the new ones. Try them out more than once so that you can build up confidence in your in your use of them. Remember that the strategies in this handbook are included here because large numbers of language learners have found them useful. So give them a try and see how they can help you improve your language learning.

Chapter One

Common Questions about Language Learning

Topics covered here:

- Can Adults Learn Foreign Languages?
- What Is the Best Way to Learn a Language?
- Can I Avoid Making Mistakes?
- What Should I Do When I Don't Understand Something?
- How Long Will It Take Me to Learn the New Language?
- Why Are Some Learners More Successful than Others?
- What Are Strategies for Learning Foreign Languages?

Can Adults Learn Foreign Languages?

It is commonly thought that children are the best language learners, and that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for older people to learn a new language. In fact, that is not true. Research shows that there is no decline in the ability to learn as people get older. Except in the case of hearing or vision loss, the age of the adult learner is not a major factor in their ability to learn a new language. Negative stereotypes of the older learner as a poor learner, and inappropriate learning and teaching strategies are the greatest obstacles to adult language learning.

In some ways, adults are better language learners than children. Adults have developed learning strategies and have more experience in learning. Children give the appearance of learning languages more easily because they are better at pronouncing them. Adults almost always have a foreign accent when they learn a new language, while children do not. We also expect less of children. When they learn a little, we are pleased. Adults, though, have greater expectations of themselves and others as language learners, and easily become discouraged if they do not learn rapidly. But children do not necessarily learn faster, and many older adults have successfully learned second and third languages.

What Is the Best Way to Learn a Language?

There is no "one and only" way that works for everybody. Learning a language is a highly individual process and consists of a combination of factors. The most important factor is not the teacher or the course. The most important factor is you, the learner, and your contribution to the process of learning. Your motivation, your reason for learning the language, your need to communicate, and your attitude are all very important.

Although there is no single ideal way to learn a foreign language, it helps considerably if you try to find opportunities to practice the language, especially speaking and listening. Shyness and fear of using the new language can considerably slow your progress. Try to develop a comfortable and worry-free approach; for example, in your attitude toward mistakes.

Can I Avoid Making Mistakes?

One of the biggest problems that language learners must overcome is their hesitancy to make mistakes. You naturally want to express yourself well, but the truth is that there is no way to learn a language without making plenty of mistakes. You must practice to learn, and when you practice you will make errors. But usually you will be understandable, even with some mistakes. And the more you speak, the better your foreign language becomes. So overcome your shyness and use the language you learn!

Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Even when native speakers smile at your performance, remember that it is usually a friendly smile and they admire you for your effort as well as for what you have already achieved in their language. Native speakers generally focus their attention on the content of your message and not on your performance or grammar. Look at errors as part of your learning process and do not let them discourage you from practicing. Without practice you cannot be successful. Later in this handbook we will talk more about how to classify your errors and use them to help you learn better.

What Should I Do When I Don't Understand Something?

Guessing is a very important part of foreign language learning. Even very advanced learners have to rely on guessing. Do not get discouraged or frustrated when your guess is wrong. The more you try the better you will become. After some practice you will find that it is not necessary to get the meaning of every word or phrase in order to understand the message. Learn to treat uncertainty as part of the process of language learning.

Relate your guessing to a specific situation, sentence context, and speaker's intention. If you don't understand, ask for clarification of words or phrases which are not clear. As you practice, you will get better and better at guessing the meaning of words you don't know.

How Long Will It Take Me to Learn the New Language?

This question cannot be answered in one sentence for all learners and all languages. Achieving fluency in a foreign language depends on many factors. There are "easier" and "more difficult" languages for an English speaker. There are languages in which it is much easier to master speaking and listening skills than reading and writing skills and vice versa. There are also different types of learners. Some want to be perfect, want to rely on familiar rules and structures, and do not want to use the language unless they are confident about how they are going to perform. Others are afraid to appear ridiculous and slow down their learning by denying themselves opportunities to practice. Still others are impatient, want to learn everything at once, and get discouraged by lack of immediate results. Some learners are rule-oriented, while others rely on intuition. Some are shy, while others are sociable. Some have been exposed to foreign languages before, while for others it is the first foreign language experience. It is not possible to predict how much time achieving fluency will take, since it is a very individual process.

You will be safe if you do not expect too much at the beginning stage. Set realistic objectives that you can fulfill, and do not let yourself get discouraged. You can avoid developing a negative attitude toward learning the language when you realize that success comes slowly, step by step, at each stage of learning.

Why Are Some Learners More Successful than Others?

Success in learning a foreign language depends on many factors. One is the learner's native ability to learn a foreign language. Another is previous experience learning new languages. Yet another is strong motivation and a positive attitude. Finally, appropriate learning strategies are very helpful for foreign language learning. These strategies are the subject of this handbook.

What Are Strategies for Learning Foreign Languages?

In learning a foreign language you use certain techniques or strategies which help you to achieve your goal. For example, in order to memorize new words you repeat them aloud or associate them with images in your mind. In other words, you use *a specific strategy* to help you to memorize your vocabulary.

Many strategies are helpful in learning a foreign language. Some are most useful for learning speaking skills, while others work best for writing skills. Some are most effective at the beginning stage, while others are preferred by advanced learners. Some strategies work well with systematic, organized students, while others are preferred by learners who rely on their intuition and use their imagination. The following chapters present a wide range of strategies for you to try in your own learning.

Chapter Two

Management Strategies for Learning a Foreign Language

Topics covered here:

- Control Your Own Learning
- Learn Language by Using It
- Experiment with the New Language
- Recognize Your Errors
- Encourage Yourself and Reward Your Efforts

Control Your Own Learning

Your teacher, your textbook, and cassette tapes are valuable learning aids, but the ultimate responsibility for your success rests with you. Good teachers and well-designed classes make a difference, but without your commitment of time and effort you will accomplish little. Use this handbook to take charge of your learning. Design a program for yourself. When you understand your individual needs and predispositions, your program will be realistic. It is important that you have a program you can stay with over a long period of time. Your program should include short- and long-term goals and should start with listening comprehension in the new language.

Start with listening first and concentrate on understanding. This is the first skill you will need to begin to learn the new language. Try to identify words that you hear often, and learn their meanings. Use your knowledge of the speaker, the topic, and the situation to guess at the meaning of what you hear. Developing good listening skills will make the next step easier.

The next step might be practicing reading skills. Most adult learners feel comfortable working on their reading skills before they start speaking, unless the language has a difficult alphabet or writing system, like Chinese or Arabic.

When you start working on your speaking skills, remember these helpful hints. Learn basic patterns which can be filled in with the words you already know. Learn whole phrases which you can use when opening a conversation, introducing some topics, or which are useful when you need time to recall a particular word or expression. Do not try to make your sentences sophisticated and complicated. It is a common mistake among beginners to try to copy their native language patterns in the foreign language. It will not work. Learn to give the message in a simplified way. Simplicity is a very important strategy in learning speaking skills as well as writing skills.

If in the first stages you feel more confident relying on written material, there is nothing wrong with that. Many learners start writing and learn to listen and read before they are ready to speak a great deal.

Experiment with the New Language

Once you are actually involved in learning a new language, you need good strategies to manage your task. The first step is to get familiar with the new language. Consider ways to understand better how the language works, how it is structured, and where the main difficulties are. Do not be afraid of the new language. Manipulate it, play with it, and try to achieve a "feeling" for the new language.

Keep experimenting with elements of the language: words, structures, rules. Can you find rhymes for the new words? Do they resemble some English words? Is there any pattern in the new nouns, adjectives, or verbs which can be followed? Find the rules – do you really understand them? Can you simplify them for your own needs? Which words can you fit into familiar patterns? Talk to yourself in the foreign language silently or aloud. Make lists of things you have in your room, things you have to buy, etc. Follow with descriptions of objects (a room, a house, a flower, a person, etc.) Try simple conversations where you play two roles (in a store, in a restaurant, etc.). Talk out loud to objects and animals. These strategies help you get ready to use the new language in real situations.

Recognize Your Errors

Mistakes are a natural part of language learning. The learner who makes no errors is a learner who is not using the language. Keeping a record of your errors in your language learning notebook will help you to remember the mistakes you make. Recognizing errors is a step toward eliminating them. Here are some other strategies to help you to make your efforts work for you and not against you:

First, assess the seriousness of your errors. Not all mistakes are equally important. Some pronunciation errors, for example, interfere with the meaning you want to communicate. Others are minor mistakes that do not affect meaning. Concentrate on those errors that can cause misunderstanding. These are easy to recognize if you pay special attention to situations where you have misunderstood something, or where others have misunderstood you. Record these in your language notebook and try to eliminate them.

Some errors, in addition to causing misunderstanding, can actually cause offense. Mistakes in gender (saying "he" when you mean "she," for example), or not knowing a polite way to end a conversation, are errors which you should try to eliminate. On the other hand, saying something like "they gone" instead of "they went" is a minor mistake which does not interfere with meaning or cause offense. Concentrate on the important errors first.

Once you have identified an error as one that you particularly want to focus on, ask yourself why you are making that error. Is it because you do not understand the rule (of pronunciation, grammar, or usage)? If so, ask your teacher or another speaker of the foreign language to help you understand the rule, or consult a grammar book or dictionary. Then practice the rule in some formal language exercises.

Do you understand the rule, but make mistakes anyway? This is common in language learning, because knowing grammar rules is not enough. You must also practice and use the new language in order to internalize its system. If you consistently make the same errors, you probably need more practice. In speaking, this means more conversational practice. In writing, it means more practice with writing.

Sometimes you may want to ask other foreign language speakers to correct you when you are talking with them. This is a strategy which should only be used occasionally, when you have time and really want to focus on accuracy. You will naturally make many errors in speech, and if your speech is constantly corrected in conversation, you will begin to feel discouraged and impatient. It is better to ask the other speaker to point out only your most important errors. If you do not understand the correction, ask for an explanation.

Most importantly, do not be embarrassed by your mistakes. They are a natural part of language learning and show that you are in the process of becoming a speaker of a foreign language!

Evaluate Your Progress

As you learn the new language, you will need ways of measuring how well you are doing and ways to check your own accuracy and progress. You can do this for each of the four language skills.

In listening, how much of a conversation do you understand (less than half? more than half? all of it?) Check with someone else to see how accurate you are. Restate the central ideas of what you hear to be sure you understand. Ask questions to get additional information about a topic. Are you understanding more than you did the last time you were in a similar situation? Are you satisfied with your progress? Determine whether you are at the stage you expected to be or wanted to be by this time.

In reading, determine whether your speed and comprehension are acceptable to you at your current stage of learning. Determine how much you understood of a given passage (everything? only a little? at least half? all the major points but only some of the minor ones?) Are you using the dictionary less often? Estimate whether your reading skills have improved since last week or last month.

In speaking, there are many ways to evaluate your progress. Listen to your own speech on tape using a tape recorder. Count the number of times you are asked to repeat something during a conversation. Pay attention to the responses of others when you speak – do they appear confused or frustrated? These are clues that you need to improve your speaking ability.

In writing, review samples of your own work and note your specific problems. Compare your writing with the writing of others who are learning the same language, or with the writing of native speakers. Compare your current writing with the writing you did last week or last month to see your progress. Look especially at your spelling, the length of your sentences, and your ability to express complex thoughts.

Encourage Yourself and Reward Your Efforts

Since you are responsible for your own learning, you also need to encourage and reward yourself when you make progress. Pay attention to your successes in learning, and make positive comments to yourself about your work. Such comments might include: "I understand everything my teacher said today" or "I'm reading much faster now than I was last month" or "I held a very successful telephone conversation in my new language today." Make statements that are relevant to you and to what you have accomplished. Repeat these statements to

yourself often to remind yourself that you are making progress and succeeding. Such statements help to change negative attitudes about yourself as a language learner, and can speed up the process of learning by convincing you that you will succeed.

Reward yourself in some tangible way from time to time for your efforts at learning the language. Promise yourself some special treat if you are able to accomplish your goals for the next week or month. This can make the learning process more pleasurable.

Reduce Your Anxiety

Nervousness and worrying about your foreign language performance can prevent you from using every opportunity to practice, and interfere with your fluency in speech. How can you decrease anxiety?

If you find that your whole body tenses when you are confronted with a foreign language situation, learn some good relaxation techniques. One technique is progressive relaxation, where you tense and then relax all the muscles in your body, starting with your feet and moving upward until you are completely relaxed.

Deep breathing and meditation are helpful to some people. Try to take a few minutes before working in the new language to empty your mind and calm yourself. Even five minutes of meditation can give you a fresh approach to the language task. Some people also find that listening to background music is helpful when they are concentrating on language study.

Find out for yourself what will relax you most. Remember, embarrassment or anxiety about using the new language will only slow you down. When you overcome your nervousness and take the risk of using the language, you will make good progress.

Chapter Three

Organizing to Learn

Topics covered here:

- Set Your Goals and Objectives
- Decide about Skills Priority
- Keep a Language Learning Notebook
- Organize and Schedule Your Learning
- Focus Your Attention

Set Goals and Objectives

Your foreign language study sessions must be planned and scheduled. Whether you are taking classes, studying with a tutor, or learning independently, you will need to set aside time to review your lessons, study new words and phrases, and practice your new language. Plan these activities as part of your normal schedule.

Set some long-term goals for yourself. Think of the next several days, weeks or the next months. For example, you might have the goal of being able to hold a long social conversation in your new language. Or being able to give instructions in the foreign language without constantly using a dictionary. Write down a desired date by which you expect to achieve your goal. Setting such a date will enable you to check your progress toward meeting your goals.

After you set long-term goals, set yourself some short-term objectives, too. These are goals for the next days or weeks. For example, your short-term objective may be to memorize a set of ten vocabulary words, or to master the past tense of regular verbs, to guess words that are not familiar the next time you talk with a native speaker, or to read a specific text or complete a particular assignment. Some of these objectives may take only a few hours, while others might take several weeks. Again, set a deadline for yourself for achieving these objectives. Check your progress regularly.

Setting goals will help you to pick strategies that are most helpful to you at each stage of learning. Keep your goals realistic and do not expect too much at the beginning. As your proficiency increases you can revise your goals.

Decide about Skills Priority

At the beginning stage it is not possible to learn all language skills at once. Think over which skills, or which combination of skills, is the most important to you and proceed slowly from what seems to you the easiest. Do not rush yourself. Every stage of your learning needs time for practice, since foreign language learning is a step-by-step process.

The first skill to develop in the foreign language is listening comprehension. It is normal that in the process of learning a foreign language students understand more than they can actually say themselves. After you have acquired basic listening comprehension skills, decide for yourself which of the remaining three skills – reading, speaking, writing – is the most important to you. In planning your time, devote most of it to developing those skills.

If your main priority is speaking, decide how good you want or need to be as a speaker. You might want to learn only basic, simple patterns and limited, job-oriented vocabulary to handle simple inquiries, job-related instructions and basic explanations. At that level you may disregard pronunciation mistakes as long as they do not cause misunderstanding or blur the meaning. You also do not necessarily need to be grammatically correct. You can concentrate on simple patterns and useful vocabulary.

If your messages in the foreign language require precision and detailed, accurate explanations, or if you want to participate fully in conversations with native speakers and communicate over the phone, you have to go further. You need to know more about the language structure, use grammatical rules, pay attention to pronunciation and know enough vocabulary to cover various social and professional topics.

There are also levels of difficulty in reading skills. In languages with scripts different from English (for example, Japanese, Arabic, and Russian), even basic reading may be difficult. However, in most languages the basic level in reading skills is achieved relatively easily. If you want to be able to read only job-related materials you need only basic grammatical structures, a limited general vocabulary, and a good professional vocabulary. If you want to read more sophisticated prose, you need a lot of practice to be able to read quickly enough, and a large vocabulary to understand the content without heavy reliance on a dictionary.

If your priority is writing in the foreign language, your goals will be similar to those for speaking and reading. There is, however, an additional difficulty, namely spelling. At the beginning level dictation may be effective in helping you connect sounds with spelling.

Keep a Language Learning Notebook

Get a special notebook that you use only to record your work in learning your new language. Use the notebook for the following purposes:

- To record your goals and objectives for learning the language.
- To write down assignments given by your instructor.
- To keep a list of new words or expressions you have learned or want to learn.
- To write down words you have heard or read that you want to ask someone about or to look up in a dictionary.
- To write down grammar rules you have learned.
- To keep notes about conversations you have in the new language.
- To summarize what you read in your new language.
- To keep a record of errors that you want to work on.
- To comment on strategies you have used successfully or unsuccessfully.
- To record the amount of time you spend each week studying or doing other activities in the foreign language.

Organize your notebook into sections for each of these purposes. The sections can be labeled or even color-coded, using a different color for each different purpose for which you are using the notebook. Write either in your native language or in your foreign language or use a mixture of both, until you are comfortable enough to write everything in the new language.

Organize and Schedule Your Learning

There are several ways that you can organize your study of a foreign language, just as you organize your professional work. Keep language books, papers, notebooks, vocabulary cards, and tapes together in a place which is convenient. Use your language notebook to organize your study.

Weekly schedules for language study are very useful. At the beginning of each week, plan the time that you will study the language during that week. If you find that you cannot meet your schedule, revise your plan for the next week so that you will schedule your study at a time when you know you will be able to follow through.

Focus Your Attention

Get the most from your study time by knowing in advance just what you want to gain from each study session. After each lesson or study session, make a short note in your notebook about what you have studied or learned. The next time you want to study, look at what you learned last and think about what you want to get from the next session. This will help you to direct your attention, identifying the most important parts of each lesson and concentrating on what you are learning.

You can also focus your attention *selectively*. That is, you can decide in advance to pay attention to specific aspects of the language. For example, if you are trying to master the past tense, you may want to pay special attention to the use of the past tense as you listen to a tape or read a passage in the new language. Or, in listening to conversations in the new language, you might decide to specifically note how people bring a conversation to a close, or how they use polite words or phrases in their conversation.

Chapter Four

Building Your Memory

Topics covered here:

- Make Lists
- Remember Places
- Use Sounds
- Use Images
- Use Actions
- Use Other Techniques

Make Lists

Listing is a particularly useful strategy for learning new vocabulary. Make a list of the new words or phrases that you are trying to learn in a foreign language. Then divide the list into parts in order to learn the parts one at a time. It is easier to learn shorter groups of items than longer groups. Master a small set before going on to more.

Your list will be even more useful if you can divide it according to particular categories. Your list can be classified in any of the following ways:

- The type of word (for example, all nouns or verbs).
- The topic (for example, words about weather, or health problems).
- The situation in which you might use the words (for example, words you might use to talk about food).
- Names of things that belong together (for example, all items that belong in a desk, such as paper, pens, pencils, scissors, etc.).

This technique not only provides you with shorter lists of items to learn, but it also helps you categorize those items in a meaningful way. This technique makes it doubly easy to learn vocabulary.

Remember Places

Remembering **places** means locating the new word or phrase in some place or context. Sometimes you can remember new words or phrases by remembering their location or place in the notebook, on the page, on the blackboard, on a street sign, or an advertisement. Remembering where you first saw the word can help you to fix it in your mind.

Other times, remembering the **situation** in which you first encountered the word will help you to remember it. When you hear or see a new word or phrase, mentally fix it in your mind as part of the situation in which you first encountered it, to make it easier to remember.

A third technique for placing words is to remember the **context** in which you first heard or read them. For example, if you find a new word while you are reading a menu, you can help yourself remember it by associating it in your mind with food in general or with a restaurant.

Use Sounds

Sounds can also be used to help you learn words or phrases in a foreign language. One technique is to remember a whole phrase or sentence by creating a new word, or acronym, from the first letter of each word you want to remember. For example:

FYI = for your information
ASAP = as soon as possible

Make up acronyms in the new language to help you remember common phrases.

Spelling a word the way it sounds can also help you remember it. If you want to remember the pronunciation of a word, write that word the way it *sounds* instead of how it is actually spelled in the language you study.

Another way you can use sounds to remember is to use accent marks. An accent mark is a sign like this (´) which marks the part of the word that has the most emphasis when you say it. For example, when you say the word "character" in English, the accent is on the syllable "cha." In order to remember where the emphasis goes, you might write the word like this, just for practice: "character."

Associating a new word with other words you already know, either in your own language or in a foreign language, can also help you remember it. For example, if you were learning English, and you knew the German word "Katze," you might find it easy to link the English word "cat" with "Katze" because they sound similar.

You can also associate a new word with a word you already know in the language you're learning. In English, for example, if you already know the word "patient" you could associate it with the new word "patience," thus helping you to remember "patience." To take this one step farther, you might visualize the "patient" waiting calmly, thus linking the sounds with a visual image of the words. The linking of sounds with mental pictures is a very powerful memory tool.

Rhymes are familiar in every language. They are sounds that are alike, such as "bat," "sat," and "hat." You can also learn new words by using rhymes or other sound-related techniques.

Use Images

Just as sounds can help you remember new words or phrases, visual techniques can help you memorize, too. Make a mental image of the new word or phrase. It does not matter what the mental image is or how bizarre or strange it is. In fact, the stranger the picture, the more likely you are to remember it!

Instead of just making a mental image of the new word or phrase, you might actually draw a picture of it on a piece of paper. Your picture can be serious, a cartoon, or just a sketch. The picture will help you remember the word or phrase.

Use Actions

Sometimes it is helpful to use actions to help you remember. Three such strategies are *card moving, physical response,* and *physical association.*

In card moving, you write new words on cards and then move them from one place to another when the word is learned. This movement can aid you in remembering.

Physical response means acting out a word or phrase physically in order to practice it. For example, to learn "Unlock the door," you might act out walking to the door and turning the key to unlock it as you say the words. The physical response allows you to link the sounds with actual movement in your body. Physical response as a memory technique is especially helpful with concrete words or phrases that can be acted out . It is less useful with abstract words or phrases.

You can also remember a word or phrase by associating it with a physical sensation or physical feeling.

Use Other Techniques

Other techniques that are useful in learning new words and phrases include flashcards, silent rehearsal, and learning whole passages.

Flashcards are small cards on which you write the new word or phrase on one side and the definition (in your own language or in the foreign language) and the phonetic spelling (to help you remember the pronunciation) on the other. Begin by looking at both sides of the card to link the new word or phrase with the other information. After practicing by looking at both sides of the card, try to look only at the side that contains the new word or phrase. Try to remember the information on the other side. You might also color-code your flashcards, with different colors for different categories.

Silent rehearsal means silently repeating a new word to yourself in order to memorize it. Practicing new phrases and sentences silently makes you more comfortable and familiar with them.

It is sometimes helpful to memorize whole passages, especially phrases which are used for greetings, introductions, and other common conversational exchanges; for example, equivalents of "How are you? I'm fine, thank you, and you?" Learning whole phrases can help you feel more comfortable with the language and allow you to learn a large amount of vocabulary and many different grammatical structures.

Chapter Five

Learning with an Instructor and on Your Own

Topics covered here:

- Take Advantage of Your Instructor's Knowledge
- Use Every Opportunity to Practice
- Create Your Own Opportunities to Use the Foreign Language
- Read on Your Own
- Keep a Journal

Take Advantage of Your Instructor's Knowledge

Your foreign language instructor is a very important source of information, not only about the language but also about the foreign culture. Ask him or her to explain experiences in the new culture that you do not understand. Focus your teacher's attention on what is relevant to you and discuss your progress with him or her.

You should expect help from your teacher, but you can help him or her, too, by creating a relaxed atmosphere of mutual understanding and cooperation.

Do not view your teacher as the only one responsible for your progress, but on the other hand, get as much out of his or her presence as possible. Your instructor might help you to choose strategies for studying the new language, but if these particular strategies do not work for you, drop or change them. Let your teacher know if the pace of learning is not right for you. Share with the instructor your ideas about what you want to know or learn. Let your teacher know if you are receiving too much or too little correction.

Your language instructor is with you to help you to understand what you are learning. It will not help you to repeat words or sentences if you do not understand what they mean. Ask the instructor to explain or clarify the language that is used during the instructional time.

Know the Goals of Each Lesson

If your instructor is not in the habit of stating the explicit goals of each lesson, ask him or her to do so. Such a goal might be: "Today we are going to listen to a tape and read a short passage. We will learn about the past tense and will practice using it in conversation." Having the goals of the lesson stated explicitly like this will help you to focus your attention and get the most out of it.

You can also focus your teacher's attention on some goals which, although you have already worked on them, are still unfulfilled or incompletely mastered.

When you have already mastered the basic skills you might suggest to your teacher other goals which are being neglected in class but are relevant to you.

Use Every Opportunity to Practice

When other people are speaking in class, listen carefully to practice your listening comprehension. When other people are asked questions, answer them silently to yourself, to stay alert and get the most practice you can. If your instructor is in the habit of interrupting you at every mistake, ask him or her to allow you some opportunities to speak without correction so that you can practice getting your meaning across fluently as well as accurately.

When other people are asked to write words or sentences on the blackboard, do the same in your notebook, and then compare. If other students are reading aloud or speaking, be sure to follow along. Don't "tune out," or you'll lose excellent opportunities for practice.

Create Your Own Opportunities to Use the Foreign Language

If you want to make a rapid progress, use opportunities that exist in the world around you. *Find a foreign language news program on the radio* and listen to it regularly. If you listen every day, you will understand more and more as you learn the vocabulary of the news event. If at first you cannot understand enough to benefit from listening, try reading a newspaper in English first, if available, before you listen to the news in the new language. Knowing the events of the day in advance will help you to understand the radio program.

Attend local events held in the foreign language, such as meetings, lectures, films. Do not get discouraged if at the beginning you do not understand much. Films are especially useful because pictures help make the meaning clear.

Use an audio-cassette player. It can be your greatest learning aid as you study the foreign language. The cassette recorder allows you to record your voice and play it back so that you can monitor your progress. Following are several strategies you can use to make your use of the cassette recorder more effective:

- When you use tapes, work in regular, short sessions. Use tapes that have natural conversations spoken at normal speed, not just drill and practice tapes. Record broadcasts or other events and then listen and re-listen to them. Also listen to interview shows for lengthier experience in hearing conversation. Write down new words you hear so you can ask someone about them later.

- Tape yourself in a conversation with your learning partner or another speaker of the foreign language. Analyze the tape for errors.

- Read aloud to yourself on tape to practice the sounds of the new language. Try to make your rhythm and intonation as natural as possible.

Learn routines in the new language. Learn useful phrases and longer passages that you can use in conversations. Think about things you often need to say and learn those as whole pieces. Learn how to describe a trip you have taken or how to talk about the weather or other forms of "small talk."

Think in the foreign language. Try to form sentences like the ones you have learned in class. Thinking in the new language can help you identify your weak areas of vocabulary and grammar.

Talk to yourself in the foreign language. Pretend you are a native speaker and try to mimic the intonation and way of speaking of the natives you have observed, even if you have to mix English with your new language.

Listen to the foreign language every chance you get. When you have the opportunity to overhear a conversation or listen to a talk in the foreign language, relax and just try to understand as much as you can. It will increase your confidence if you have the opportunity to listen to the language in situations in which you do not need to respond.

Read on Your Own

Reading on your own will considerably increase your comprehension. The easiest reading materials are simple illustrated stories since pictures help to make the meaning clear. If these are not available, try newspapers. Look for articles on familiar topics.

While reading, concentrate on main ideas only. Use every clue to help you understand. Preview the article (story) before you begin reading. Look carefully at pictures, graphs, and headings. Get a general idea of what the text is about before you begin. As you read, pay special attention to words and phrases that show how the writer has organized the text. Such clues include introductions, summaries, titles, headings, and conclusions.

Do not reach for the dictionary every time you encounter a new word. Instead, try to guess the meaning of the word by looking at parts of the word and by thinking about the rest of the sentence and about what you already know about the topic.

After reading, summarize what you have read. Take a few minutes after you read in the foreign language to write down the main points of what you have read. To help you do this, you may want to highlight or underline important points as you read. As a beginner you can write in your own language; at higher proficiency levels your notes can be in the foreign language, giving you practice in writing as well as reading. Your notes can take many forms:

- An outline of the main points with some supporting details.
- A translation of key passages into your own language.
- A summary of the whole article.

Keep a Journal

A journal is simply a personal record of daily events, thoughts, and feelings, written in the foreign language. It is not the same as your language learning notebook, which is a record of your progress and goals. A journal is a more personal record of your experiences in learning your new language. Keeping a journal gives you the opportunity to practice your writing skills without the pressure of having someone else evaluate your work. Writing regularly without worrying about errors will help you develop fluency. The personal journal (in the foreign language) is an excellent way to develop and practice your writing skills.

Chapter Six

Learning at Work

Topics covered here:

- Learn the Language You Need for Specific Tasks
- Find a "Learning Partner" Who Will Practice with You
- Develop Specific Skill-Related Strategies
- Develop Strategies for Specific Situations

Learn the Language You Need for Specific Tasks

At the end of your formal instruction in the new language, you will be expected to handle basic tasks even though the process of learning is not finished. When you start working with native speakers, you will not only practice and reinforce what you have learned but you will also improve your foreign language in specific, job-related situations.

Consider how you can use your new language at work. Make a list of tasks that require the foreign language. Such a list might include:

- Reading job-related documents.
- Participating in and conducting training sessions.
- Holding meetings with native speakers to learn from them and discuss new ideas.

Ask yourself what you would like to be able to read, understand, or say in the foreign language in these situations. Identify the purposes for which you need the foreign language so that you can design a continuing learning program for yourself which meets your needs. Learn the words and phrases which will be useful to you in the situations in which you can use your foreign language on the job.

Find a "Learning Partner" Who Will Practice with You

A key element in learning on the job is finding someone who will practice your new language with you. Find a "learning partner" who is also learning the same language. Language learning occurs primarily through interaction and practice, so cooperation with another learner will help you proceed much faster.

Have daily conversations in your new language. Even at beginning levels, you can usually find something to say to each other. Your partner will be able to help you practice and will also be able to help you identify your common mistakes without causing you embarrassment.

At intermediate and advanced levels, try having telephone conversations with your learning partner. Talking on the phone is more difficult than talking in person, since you cannot see your conversational partner or use gestures to help you get the meaning across.

If you are part of a team on a project, try to discuss the progress you are making in the foreign language. Encourage the others to practice also, even if you are not using the foreign language on that project. Create as many practice opportunities as you have time for.

Develop Specific Skill-Related Strategies

Following are some specific strategies for learning the different language skills: *reading*, *writing*, *listening*, and *speaking*.

Strategies for Reading

Reading professional materials will not only help you learn new words, but will also help you become familiar with how things are said in job-related situations. The more you read, the faster and better you will be able to read. You will acquire new vocabulary and improved grammar as well. Two main strategies for reading on the job are: *know your purpose* and *choose the approach that goes with your purpose*.

Know your purpose: It is very important to know the purpose for which you are reading. Are you reading to find out specific information or for general ideas? Different purposes lead to different approaches to the text. In some cases it is possible just to scan the text for particular items of information or key words or phrases. At other times you will need to read more carefully.

Choose the approach that goes with your purpose: There is a difference between reading to learn the language and reading for information. When you read for the purpose of learning the language you should read texts that you know you will understand. When you read for information, focus on the content and do not let yourself become bogged down in details.

Strategies for Writing

Four key strategies will help you to write more effectively on the job: *prepare for writing*, *imitate other texts*, *learn your errors*, and *edit your writing*.

Prepare for writing: Before you start to write, plan what you will say. In your foreign language or in English, write down the key points you want to make. Then organize the points into a short outline.

Imitate other texts: Look at other texts of the same type you want to write. Imitate the form and way of presenting facts and discussions. Learn some standard ways of expressing agreement and disagreement, recommendations, requests for action, etc.

Learn from your errors: Besides fluency, you also want to develop accuracy. Find someone with good foreign language skills who is willing to check your writing. Correct your errors and keep a record of them in your language learning notebook.

Edit your writing: Correct and revise your initial drafts in your foreign language just as you do in English. If you are keeping a record in your notebook of your common writing errors, you can refer to it to help you focus on your problem areas. Keep your sentences short in order to communicate clearly and effectively.

Strategies for Listening and Speaking

There are two aspects to the development of conversational skill: listening and speaking. Two strategies for developing conversational skill are: *be a good listener* and *be a good conversation manager*.

Be a good listener: Developing good listening skills will help you in speaking, too. By listening you can pick up new words and phrases. By listening to native speakers, you can learn how they open and close conversations, how they offer excuses or apologies, and how they ask questions or give instructions. If you lack confidence in speaking the language, take the "good listener" role when you have an opportunity to talk with someone, until your confidence increases. Use the foreign language equivalents of these phrases which encourage the speaker:

"Uh-huh"
"Yes"
"I know what you mean"
"That's interesting"

If you lose the train of thought of the speaker, ask for help, or ask for repetition or slower speech, with phrases equivalent to English:

"Pardon me."
"I'm sorry, what was that again?"
"Did you say . . ?"
"What does _____ mean?"
"Would you repeat that, please?"
"Please speak more slowly."
"I'm sorry, I don't understand."

If you know in general what the speaker is saying but need more information to clarify the details, ask questions of this type:

"What did he do then?"
"When will that happen?"
"Who said that?"
"What did you think about that?"

Try to guess what people are saying by "listening" to more than just the words. Pay attention to the situation itself, and the body language (motions and gestures) of the speaker as well as the words. Use what you know about the topic to help you understand.

Be a good conversation manager: If you want to appear to be a good speaker of the foreign language, take charge of the conversation and set the topic yourself so that you are talking about a familiar subject and can feel confident.

Imitate speakers of the new language. Pay attention to the words and phrases that they use so that you can use them later. Listen to their intonation, the rhythm of their speech.

When practicing with your learning partner, use every means you can to get your point across. Use a mixture of English and your new language. Use the grammar rules you have learned without worrying about possible exceptions. Even if you make a mistake, your conversational partner will very likely understand your meaning.

Another way to keep the conversation moving is to use a word that means about the same thing when you cannot think of the right word. Use actions or gestures to help you get your meaning across.

Develop Strategies for Specific Situations

Following are strategies that can be used in meetings and training sessions. Adapt these strategies to other specific situations in which you need to use your new language.

Strategies for Participating in or Conducting Meetings or Training Sessions

If you attend meetings which are held in the foreign language, you can take steps to make your participation in those meetings more effective. The following strategies will help you in meetings: *preview the meeting, prepare yourself to ask questions,* and *prepare for oral presentations.*

Preview the meeting: Think about the meeting in advance. Anticipate key vocabulary that will be used in the meeting.

Prepare yourself to ask questions: Think about the questions that you want to have answered at the meeting. Write out your questions in the new language, and, if possible, have a native speaker review them for clarity and accuracy.

Prepare to speak: If you have to give a presentation in the foreign language during a meeting, prepare for it in advance by outlining what you will say, including words that are key vocabulary or that you think you might forget. Practice giving your presentation and tape-record yourself. Listen to the tape with your learning partner or someone with good foreign language skills and ask for feedback about how clear and understandable your presentation is.

Following are some words you might learn to understand and say. They provide clues for listeners to understand the organization and flow of a presentation:

Type of Clue	*English Examples*
Numbers	"There are two reasons why . . ."
Questions	"Do you understand . . . (me?, the meaning of . . ?, the assignment?)"
Introductory summaries	"Let me first explain . . ."
Development of an idea	"Another reason . . ."
	"On the other hand . . ."
	"Therefore . . ."
	"Since . . ."
	"In addition . . ."
Transitions	"Now let us turn our attention to . . ."
	"If these facts are true, then . . ."

Type of Clue	*English Examples*
Sequence of ideas	"First . . ."
	"The next . . ."
	"Finally . . ."
Emphasis of ideas	"This is important because . . ."
	"The significant results were . . ."
	"Let me repeat . . ."
Summary of ideas	"In conclusion . . ."
	"As I have shown . . ."

Conducting training in your newly acquired language requires a lot of preparation. Plan for the following activities: giving presentations, asking questions for clarification, answering questions, giving detailed explanations, and holding conversations with others.

Conclusion

This handbook has suggested many strategies for improving your language learning in the many situations you will encounter as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

To use learning strategies most effectively, evaluate the strategies you are currently using. For instance, many learners rely heavily on memory strategies. Memory strategies are important, but memorizing is not enough. This handbook shows you that there are other effective strategies for learning a new language. Try some of the approaches suggested here.

Using these techniques should help you continually improve your skills in the new language during the time you are in-country as a Volunteer. Your increasing ability to communicate in the language of the country in which you serve will prove a valuable asset in achieving your other technical goals.

Good luck in your language efforts!

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